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VITA

A DRAMA BY

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD

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VITA: A DRAMA

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD

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TO

FRANCESE LITCHFIELD TURNBULL

PERSONAGES.

TIME, *Guardian of Truth.*
VITA, *Daughter of Time.*
TRUTH.
HAPPINESS.
FAITH,
CARE,
MALICE,
} *Attendants of Vita.*
HOPE, *A Sorceress.*
HISTORY, *A Herald.*
Three Courtiers.
Chorus of the Days.

ACT I

[*Scene I. Throne-room in the palace of* TIME. *Chorus —seven maidens hand in hand— surrounding the throne.* TIME *seated in state upon it.*]

Chorus O most mighty, most glorious,
Most high, most victorious,
Most ancient of birth!
O Monarch supremest!
O Power extremest
And gentlest of Earth!

Who are we to adore thee?
What are all things before thee
But drops in a river
That hastes to be tossed in thee,
Left in thee, lost in thee
For ever and ever!

O Ruler of Ages,
Awarder of wages
To the cycles in round!
We grow faint in thy glory,
O Sovereign hoary,
Star-girdled, sun-crowned!

[*The music becomes softer and softer and the maidens disappear with the last line, their song still sounding faintly in the distance. Enter* HISTORY.]

History Hail, Master!
Time Thou art welcome, History.
Whence comest thou?
History From every whither home.
Time What hast thou gleaned?
History Both good and evil.
Time Much
I trow of evil, but yet more of good,
Else hast thou falsely garnered. Sift thy savings.
History There have been mighty wars.
Time I will note down
Their chieftains. Be the rest forgot. Pass on.
History One fell for whom a stricken world makes [moan.
Time I will replace him.

History All the earth is red
And sick with blood.
Time I will remantle it
With peace and flowers.
History There live who best were dead.
Time I will o'ertake them.
History A new creed is born.
Time I will examine it.
History A genius dies
Unrecognized.
Time I will embalm his name.
History A villain walks in honor.
Time I will shame
His tomb.
History Men toil.
Time I will bring rest to each.
History Men weep.
Time I will bring all forgetfulness. —
Hast more?
History But this. One seeketh Truth of thee.
Time Thinks he to look on Truth and live?
History He dares.
Time Whence comes he?
History No man knoweth whence or when,
Or more than that Earth names him Happiness.

Time I know him of repute, but not of form.
I have not looked on him since Earth was young,
And have grown old in watching for him. Go.
[*Exit* HISTORY]
Ha, this imports in very deed! He comes—
He whom I could not summon at my will,
Nor bend to my control! He comes at last,
Yet not because I call him. He seeks Truth;—
Of me, her long-time guardian, would obtain her.
Fool! Fool! Have they who sought her of me found?
Have they who begged her of me won their prayer?
Not yet! Men cry out: Truth! Oh give us Truth!
And know not what they cry for. Did I yield,—
Did I at their insistence bring her forth
And set her in the midst of them, ablaze
With the bareness of her splendor,—why, what then?
Earth is not yet a-tempered to her presence.
Men hold their cursèd idols all too close
To their false hearts to meet Truth face to face,
To take her by the hand, and say: Be mine!
What throne so high is, she might sit upon it
Nor dim the crown of him who sat beside her?
What creed so pure is, she might worship by it
Nor show their garments spotted who made prayer?
What love so bright she would not tarnish it,
What art so rich she would not beggar it
With but a look? Go to! The day's not ripe

For her revealing. Truth is dangerous
To hearts unaccoladed to her touch.
She shall not forth.

[*Enter* VITA]

Time Thou, Vita?

Vita Greeting, Father.

Time Fitly thy coming chimeth with desire.
Here's joy for thee.

Vita Ripe fruits hang not o'er long.
I plucked thy word in coming. Grateful was't
To my life's thirst.

Time How came my word to thee?

Vita Methinks my heart did hear before mine ears.
They catch light sounds who hark for Happiness.

Time Then listen close. For soft as step of sun
On cushioned sward, — noiseless as rush of star
Across night's azure, — still as stir of leaf
Unfurling to the spring, — so Happiness
Comes to this world of watchers, so goes by
Unheard.

Vita What boots it then I waste slow years
Mistaking mine own pulse-beats for his coming?
Great Father, giver of gifts, crown thou my being!
Bid Happiness be mine!

Time This may I not.

Vita How may'st thou not? What wonder-working
Can bar the consequence of thy command? [will
Are not all born thy slaves?

Time All save this one,
Who neither calls me Lord nor is my vassal.

Vita Thou mock'st! Art not supreme?

Time There is no power
But hath its bound. Albeit my law obtains
From this pale globe to Heaven's remotest sun,
Here ends my rule. Here ends my sovereignty.

Vita Thou nam'st thy greatness and thy nothingness
In the one breath. What is that power worth
Which doth possess all excellence save one
Which is the essence and the sum of all?
Father I will have Happiness! I will!
Give thou me Happiness! Give, give! oh give!

Time Leave off thine importunities. Weak prayers,
Blown by vain winds against the impossible,
Make shipwreck and are lost.

Vita But wherefore then
Comes Happiness so near, if not to me?
Better afar, than nigh and yet not mine!
More blest is he who ne'er knew Happiness,
Than he who buys the knowledge with the loss.

Time Not so, while memory thereof endures
To gild life's desert with its afterglow.

Vita To live in light of a remembered joy
Is but through deepening dusks to mourn the sun.
Whose eyes shall drink their fill of Happiness
While mine go starved?

Time The clear, wide eyes of Truth.

Vita Truth! Truth! I love her not!

Time Bestir thee then
To win thee Happiness. Behold, are not
The days of all thy life within thy hands
To mould them as thou wilt for good or ill?
Thyself, and naught outside thee, is thy fate.
That thou becomest shapes thy destiny.
Be strong. Be just. Be purposeful. Be true.
Make Happiness thine own.

Vita So fair a prize
What hand could choose but reach for, though to [miss?
Deem me not over-bold, but dutiful,
That my wish leaps to action. Happiness
Shall yet be mine—oh joy!—shall be mine own—
Mine own! oh joy—joy—joy!

Time Oh blinded heart
And poor! Oh falsest vision! Happiness
Comes not at call, depends not on desire,
Matches no dream, and fits to no man's measure.
Not they who seek are they who find. Not they
Who ask, receive. But they who neither look

Nor pray for guerdon, they who largely live,
Freed from self's narrow shackles by a love
Broad as humanity, whose every thought
Is some white deed done for the joy of serving,—
To these, unheralded, unrecognized
Save in that inmost shrine where burns his light,
To these comes Happiness, to these brings Heaven.—
Thou foolish heart and vain! Pass on. Pass on.
[*Exeunt*]

[*Scene II.* VITA's *apartments.* FAITH, CARE *and* MALICE *winding wreaths.*]

Care Our mistress tarries.

Faith She will come anon.

Malice I'll leave off labor till she nighs. No need
To prick my fingers in her absence.

Care Whence,
That thou may'st idle must we twain work double?
How think'st thou, Faith?

Faith We shall have double joy
For her approval of the labor done.
Speed thee, good Care. She surely cometh soon.

Malice Wherefore her haste, when she may stay and [stuff
Her hungry ears with news of Happiness?

Care Oh Heavens! Would I were a queen!

Malice 'Twere easy.

Plait thee a galling crown of thy life's thorns,
And wear them regally in all men's sight
Upon thy brow, in lieu of next thy heart;
Thus shalt thou ape Earth's queens. To be high-
Is but to be a puppet in a show, [placed,
Who moves, who speaks, who weeps for men's diver-
Wearing its feelings, like its tawdry gems, [sion,
Outside, for coarse-grained multitudes to blink at!

Faith Heed not when Malice mocks. To be a queen
Is to make sorrow royal in degree,
And mirth most generous, since nations share it.
Why would'st thou be a queen?

Care That Happiness
Might reach e'en me. Methinks a single smile,
Dropped on my life like sunshine on a seed,
Would ripen flowers in it. But a maid
So lowly born as I—how should I dream
Of Happiness?

Malice Dream not. A pity 'tis
When high-strung hearts be joined to low-tuned lives.
It doth put Nature out of harmony.

Faith Nay, keep thy lofty longings. They are stars
To steer by as we climb the road to Heaven.
I, too, have dreamed of Happiness;—such dreams!—
So fair they made a very day of night.
Such dreams! Such dazzling, full, sufficient dreams,
I am content in the remembering them.

Malice 'Tis a thin soul that feeds on shadows.
Care Hush!
Our Mistress!
[*Enter* VITA. *The maidens spring to offer her flowers, and place garlands about her dress.*]
Vita Haste! And ply your uttermost
Of skill. I would be fair this day. A glass!
Faith [*kneeling before her and looking lovingly up at her.*]
I'll be thy glass to tell thee thou art fair.
Malice [*to Vita*]
Because she thinks as thou dost, being so true
A reflector of thyself! Thy mirror, I,
To tell thee thou art fairest when none's by.
Care Too fair thou art; too pale. Thou showest [weary.
And here's a hair,—not white, but fading surely.
Soon will it whiten; soon shall whiter follow.
Vita Where? Where? Must I already flaunt Time's [signet?
Faith Dear Lady, I will lay the wreaths so close
It shall not show.
Vita Ay, wrap me up in bloom.
Hide my poor faults with fragrant overgrowths.
Touch every blemish with such tender art
It turn to beauty, making me more fair
For glory of misfortunes garlanded.
Malice Fittest were roses with their thorny sweets,
For such disguisement.

Vita Bring my richest robe.

Faith [*bringing mantle*]
The richer will this be to-morrow, Lady,
For joys it shall to-day inherit.

Malice Nay,
If garments keep the good of bygone hours,
Then rags be choicest vestment for a prince.

Care [*examining mantle*]
Here soon shall be a rent. Here shows a stain.

Malice Where tears fell, likest.

Faith The more surely then
Are smiles erelong to follow. Whilst it storms,
May seers be boldest in predicting sun.

Vita My jewel case!

Care [*turning over the jewels*]
Alas! Here lacks a gem.

Vita [*fastening on necklace*]
Doth this become me?

Malice Troth, as dews the thistle.

Vita [*fastening on different jewels*] And these?

Care Thou wilt o'erload thyself. Thy love
Will know not if he look on gems or thee.

Vita That love which doth not see me in my gems,
Distinguishing the oneness of my soul
Through all the outward trickery of dress
And mummery of fashion, holding these

As part of me and not disguise of me,
That love were small worth having.
Malice Why, in truth,
If these thy gems have any share in thee,
Now art thou well worth loving.
Vita Prithee, peace,
Thou wasp-tongued Malice!
Malice Heed! Thy love may hear,
And hold thy speech to be such part of thee
He choose not take thee with it. [*going*] Ah, vain
Decking thy poor conceit with buds and gems! [fool,
Can Happiness be lured with baits like these? [*Exit*]
Care I doubt there's such a thing as Happiness,
'Tis but the name of some sweet, hopeless hope
That men do bind their souls with when they bleed,
To stay the bleeding, though it heal them not.
I'll think no more on Happiness. The dream
Hath sure no mating with reality. [*Exit*]
Vita My heart turns chill with sudden doubt, as when
A drifting cloud eclipsing the sweet sun
Drops its cold shadow o'er a startled land.
O Faith, is verily the world so void?
Is there no Happiness this side of Heaven?
Does Death hold all the gain of living?—Speak!
Faith Ah Lady, have I knowledge more than thou?
The world is vast, and all its vexing roads
Round out through darkness to an unseen goal.

And men grope here and there with helpless hands,
And cry: Lo this—lo that—is Happiness!
And clutch at strangest phantoms. Yet somewhere—
I needs believe it or the doubt would kill,—
Somewhere, e'en here, is a true Happiness
That true hearts find and live by. The good God
Withholds not all His gifts from Earth for Heaven.

Vita O Faith, thou sweetest voice to dumbest souls,
Thou lantern-light to stumbling feet,—abide,
Abide thou with me now and evermore!

[*Enter* CARE *and* MALICE]

Malice Lo, Happiness approacheth!

Vita Ah then, go!
Leave me! Go all! I fain would be alone
To dream that dream ecstatic which precedes
The waking of attainment.

Faith Dream in peace. [*Exit*]

Care Nay, rouse thee from thy trance! Is Happiness
So lightly thine,—so swiftly, surely won?

Vita Let the fear lie. Why fret the living hour
With dread of unborn moments?

Malice Blind, oh blind!
To Truth, not thee, he comes. Since when proved
So mean a rival? [Truth

Vita Truth is hidden deep.
Not his to find her.

Malice But who seeks for Truth,
Is lost to thee.

Vita Yet sure he goes not far.

Care Thou hast deep drunken at Faith's fount.
Thy hope imperil not thy caution. [Beware

Malice Ay,
No prayer can stay him if he choose to go;
And if he go, no hope may follow him.

Vita Ah, if he leave me, could my charmed feet
Refrain from following after in the trace
However faint and far of Happiness?

Malice There is no path so all-intolerable
As that we tread where Happiness hath been
And is not.

Vita Prithee keep thy bitter thoughts
For thine own soul's digesting, and go hence!
Why foretell loss of what not yet I have?
What though the dream prove vain? It is most
And I will feast upon it while it lasts, [sweet;
Nor brook starvation in its turn the worse!
I will not hearken more. Away! Go! Go!

Care I go. But not for long. [*Exit*]

Malice I will be nigh. [*Exit*]

Vita [*alone*] Now beauteous dream, return! Now steep
In Earth's divinest rapture,—Happiness [my soul
Not fully come, but swiftly, surely coming;—

So surely there can be no doubt to mar:
So swiftly there's but space to say: I wait!
Yet still too far to surfeit with possession;—
Like that rich hunger heralding a feast,
Which waxes poorer for the feeding of it.
Oh very heart of ecstasy—to know
Fulfilment nigh, yet still anticipate!

[*Enter* HAPPINESS]

Happiness Not here!

Vita [*trembling*] Oh Heavens! Is this Happiness?

Happiness Am I so strange to look upon that one
Should know me not? I pray thee, where is Truth?

Vita Nay, wait! How know'st thou Truth?

Happiness Through love of her.

Vita How camest thou to love her?

Happiness Seeking her,
I loved her.

Vita Thou wilt find her not.

Happiness I shall.

Vita Then stay! Give o'er the quest! For I am she.

Happiness Soil not thy sweet mouth with so sad a lie.
Farewell.

Vita Stay! Stay! How knowest thou I lie?

Happiness Because thou art not Truth.

Vita How canst thou know?
Nor thou nor any ever has seen Truth.
Am I not fair enough?
Happiness Too fair by far,
In outward ornament.
Vita [*flinging off jewels*] O cruel! What,
Am I not sweet enough?
Happiness Too sweet by far
With borrowed beauty.
Vita [*tearing off flowers*] Oh most heartless! Still
Am I not rich enough?
Happiness Too rich by far
In all that is not thee.
Vita [*throwing off mantle*] Inhuman! Look!
Look on me now! Am I not bare enough,
And poor enough and plain enough for Truth?
Happiness Too plain, too poor, too bare. Truth in her-
Lacks nothing. Thou in everything lack'st Truth. [self
Vita Truth! Truth! I hate her! And she is not
For I have seen her—seen she is not fair! [fair!
Happiness Thou hast seen Truth?
Vita Oh long—oh long ago,
In days when still I knew there was a God,
And that the stars meant Peace and sometime
And then I saw her, and she then was fair, [Heaven.
But not so fair I long desired her;

And soon did I with loathing put her far,
And turn mine eyes from her and speak her not,
And hate her with worst hatred.

Happiness Oh, forsworn
The eyes that having looked on Truth, see aught,
Love aught besides save Truth for ever after!
Lo, I have seen her not; yet shrined within
Mine inmost soul her holy image lies,
Peerless, transcendent, perfect, holding me
From thought and breath, save thought and breath
Where is she? [for her.

Vita I know not. My father, Time,
Concealed her, and I since cared not to seek,
Cared not to know. What matters it to me,
Who have one passion only in my breast,—
One riotous love, devouring all my being,
Like a vast fire—a lurid gluttony
From sky to sky, with death and ruin after!

Happiness I pity thee. And so farewell again.

Vita Nay, nay! oh stay! oh leave me not—not [now—
Dear Happiness! One little moment more
Let me but look on thee,—let me but fill
Mine eyes so full of the rare sight of thee,
They hold thee unforgotten in thine absence!

Happiness Peace come to thee. And a third time, [farewell.

Vita [*kneeling*] O God! O God! May I entreat
Must I see Happiness depart from me, [Thee not?
Nor fling such mighty prayers out on the way
He cannot pass them? Let me bind him down
With prayers, enchain him with such close petition
He cannot leave me!

Happiness Peace, poor Vita, peace!
No prayer so perfect is, no faith so strong
It can lay lasting hold on Happiness.
I go. Forbear thy weeping. Tears are wings
That speed my going. Fare thee well. [*Exit*]

Vita Gone! Gone!
And all my heart cries out: Forever!—What?
Weep not?—I will pierce Heaven with my cries!
Will storm God's Throne with clamorous appeal,
Compelling mercy for my misery!
O God, was it so much I asked of Thee
Thou could'st not grant it to a lifetime's praying?
Would it have beggared Thee of Happiness
Bestowing but this single boon I craved?
Hear! Hear! Or art Thou deaf, and Heaven so far
All prayers fall short of Thee? Or did'st Thou give
Me being, but that I might curse the gift?
Can Thy omnipotence do naught, save stamp
Self-consciousness of weakness on me? Nay,
Not so learned I to know Thee—oh, not so!
They told me God meant Mercy, Patience, Love,

And tenderest Compassion,—not Despair!—
Not a divine Inexorability
For souls to beat and crush themselves against
In weak antagonism!—O God—O God—
Forgive the hatred of a broken heart!
Forgive the madness of a misery
That knows not what it speaks! Forgive! Forgive!

[*Enter* MALICE, FAITH *and* CARE.]

Malice I heard thee from afar. What mean thy cries?
Faith [*raising up* VITA] Oh my loved mistress, what is
[come to thee?
Care [*picking up jewels*] Broken and crushed beyond
Vita Ay. Ay. [repair!
Like hearts that soared too high, and falling, shivered.
Faith [*gathering up the flowers*] Nay, see, these yet are
Vita Like scattered hopes [sweet.
That shall not bloom again through all the years;
Yet sweet unto the end;—ay, ay; most sweet!
Faith [*lifting the mantle*] And this; thou yet canst
Vita [*dashing it off.*] Never! Never! [wear it.
There leave it to be trodden underfoot!
Never again shall I stand decked in buds
And gems, and plume myself upon my fairness!
The dream is ended, and the charm is broken.
Poor gems! [*lifting them*] So poor ye are? And yet I
[thought

That ye could win me Happiness! Poor flowers!
[*raising them.*]
So slight? So frail?—I thought ye strong enough
To keep me Happiness! Poor signs of wealth!
[*Spurning them with her foot.*]
How worthless all,—how vain—how impotent
To bring me Happiness again!

Faith Dear Heart,
Is Happiness so far?

Care Too far to follow.

Vita Faint hearts are leaden-soled. He is too far.

Faith Dear Lady, Happiness is ne'er too far
To hope and strive for.

Malice Nor too near to miss.

Faith O Mistress, would'st thou seek? I go with thee.

Vita Ah me, but whither go—but whither turn?
How follow footsteps that have left no trace?

Malice He sure goes free of heart that treads so light!

Vita In quest of Truth he went.

Faith Then follow we
In search of Happiness.

Care The way is long.

Faith But Time shall lead us, and an end must be.

Vita Ay, let us go. Although the way be far,
Were loss and failure keener at the end

Than the beginning? And the chance is there.
Better to risk content on the poor hope
Of winning more, than be content with less.
Go. Go. Make ready. For the way is long!

ACT II

[*Scene I. A forest. Night.* HAPPINESS *alone.*]

Happiness O Truth, where art thou? In the whole
Is there no pole-star that doth point to thee [wide heaven
Immovably, through all of lapsing time?—
No magnet in the whole vast universe
To draw to thee through rankest overgrowth?
O Truth, hast thou no voice to call to me
Athwart the dark, that I come where thou art?
No clue to aid me—no firm-woven thread
To guide me through life's starless labyrinth?
Truth, answer! Art thou living whom I seek?
Or art thou but a name,—a phantom thing
To lure men with false show to far destruction?
Nay! Nay! Thou livest! Every star that sends
Its conquering ray across night's black abysm,—
Each sea that, torn with infinite desire,
Stretches its seeking arms out toward the shore,—

Each storm that sweeps, magnificent and bold,
With fringe of lightning, scimitar of rain
And crown of massive darkness, like a king
Across the humbled land,—each summer eve
That pours its stillness and its angel calm
Upon the restless pulses of the day,—
Each, each proclaims thee, all do bear thee witness,
Speaking in utterance distinct and clear
To the blest soul that loves thee,—blest enough
In that it love thee, though it find thee not.
But I will win! No height so dizzy is,
No precipice so sheer, gulf so profound,
Gloom so intense that it shall fright me back!
With love to light me, reason for a staff
And God for Guide, how shall I miss of Truth?
Courage, faint heart! Wing thy slow feet with prayer,
Lift thy bowed head, and onward! onward! onward!
[*Exit*]

[*Enter* TIME, VITA *and* COURT.]

History It hath been told of him he passed by here.

Care O sorry guide, who augurs for the future
From so dead past! Hath it been ever seen
That Happiness returned the way he went?

Vita Methought I saw him but a moment since.

Time Thou should'st have held the moment. Once
With utmost swiftness, cannot overtake it. [fled, Time

Faith Then let it pass. Another comes as sweet.
1st Courtier Whither went Happiness?
2d Courtier This way!
3d Courtier No, this!
2d Courtier Sure, here are tracks of him.
3d Courtier Sure, here he stayed.
1st Courtier Surest of all, here is he not!
Time Pass. Pass.
Courtiers Which way?
Time Forward. I turn not back.
Vita Alas,
Could'st thou but bring me once more to that hour
When I beheld him, though he was not mine,
Should I lack more?
Faith Dear Lady, take thou heart!
Thou yet shalt see him, though the night be dark
And the way long that bring thee.
Malice Long! Long!
Time Pass.
1st Courtier Hold, hold! methinks—
2d Courtier I would make sure—
3d Courtier One glance—
Time Pass.
[*Exit* COURTIERS *slowly*.]
History Stay! The day is not yet written—

Time Pass.

[*Exit* TIME *and* HISTORY, *the chorus, too, moving off as it sings.*]

Chorus Softly and oftly
Like drops in a shower,
Lightly and brightly
Like leaves from a flower,
So they pass, so they pass,
The sweet hours, alas!
Like a breath on the glass,
Like a face in a dream.
So they come, set adrift
Where Time's rivers rift,
Gliding passive and swift
Adown with the stream.
So they come; so they go;
Ere we see, ere we know;
Fading out of our clasp
Ere our hands loose their grasp.
With all that is sweetest,
All dearest, all fleetest,
They pass, and they pass,
While men cry: Alas!

So we live, so we die,
Like a weed, like a flower.
So a lifetime goes by

Like the fall of an hour.
Though we weep in it, laugh in it,
Pray in it, chaff in it,
Starve in it, quaff in it
Reddest of wines,—
Though all is begun in it,
All to be won in it,
And nothing is done in it
When it declines;
Will the daylight hold longer
For prayers that grow stronger,
Nor darkness crawl after
Through tears, or through laughter?
Nay, Death will delay not.
The hour will stay not.
And we—so we pass,
Though men cry: Alas!

[*Exit* Chorus]

Vita Oh woe! Oh woe! How must they not be
Who thus bewail life's passing! Time is long, [happy,
And Grief is slow, and Death is tardy-footed
To him whose years hang on his neck like beads
That he must tell off one by one in turn,
With prayers and moans and scourgings unto blood,
Ere he may break his fast!
Malice With bitter herbs
And water!

Care Life is longest to who labors,
Counting the time between his work and gain;—
To him who pays the bread of yesterday
With this day's toil; to him whose bursting brain
Travails in sleep, and works across its dreams,
And knows no Seventh Day from year to year.
The weeping doth forget his grief in sleep.
The hungry dreams, and sitteth at a feast.
For sick men there grow drugs to dull the pain.
But for the anxious man,—the man of cares,—
Nature provides no anodyne.

Malice Save death.

Vita All lives are long. The babe that lives an hour,
Hath too much time to weep in.

Malice Not enough
To learn to smile in.

Faith Nay, the soul that sees
The far pure end of its creation,—fair
To longing sight as flower on lifted stalk
Grown high above the sordid ground it sprang from,—
That soul delights in life, and finds time scant
For full achievement of allotted powers.

Vita They must be either young or far in years
Who joy in life; the young because they still
See Earth athwart the light they brought from Heaven;
The old, because at closing of their day

Death lends his sunset glow to life's grey sky
As last relief to long monotony.
But he who is not young, and ah, not old,—
Who living through youth's exquisite delusions
Has reached the Desert of Reality,
And feels its arid winds upon him, sees
Its white hot dust—its cruel stretch of bareness,
Yet knows no outcome save the path that leads
Across its dreariness to far-off Death,—
Shall such an one love life?

Faith 'Tis piteous
How men forget a thousand present blisses
Remembering a single pain that pricked,
And overlook a myriad flowers in bloom
For grief of one bruised bud! Be not thou so.
Nor think thyself elected from thy fellows
To royal wretchedness. For Sorrow keeps
No separating throne where one may sit,
Crowned with distinction of a supreme pain,
To rule his kind by might of suffering.
In sorrow all are equal, though men flaunt
Their martyrdom before the world, or wear
Their sackcloth hidden under festal robes.
Dear Lady, smile as thou wert wont to smile!
Doth Nature not go through her round the same
From year to year, and find as many flowers
To deck this Spring with as she found the last?

Yet she hath wept between times. So thou, too,
Sweet Lady, cast thy dead woe off. Be glad.

Vita Can one be happy, without Happiness?

Faith Ay. Thou hast looked on Happiness. Enough.
Thou hast the memory thereof for ever.

Malice Why, if thy heart be set on Happiness,
Pursue thou not the search? I know of one
Who sure will aid thee, though all others fail.

Vita Thou dost? And whom?

Malice That ancient Sorceress,
Who with her magic and her muttered charms
Holds half the known world spellbound.

Vita Who is she
Thus potent?

Malice Hope.

Vita Bring me to her straightway.

Faith O Lady, pause! I know her. She is old
And potent truly, but may play thee false.
Not all who seek of Hope win Happiness!

Care I know Hope not. The very name is strange.

Malice And hadst thou sooner known her, thou wert
Less age-worn. She hath wondrous mysteries [now
That, rightly used, do keep one young for ever.

Vita Where lives she?

Faith O sweet Mistress, trust her not!

Vita Why now, what frights thee? She who conquers
Must be a right rare witch! Bring me to her. [Time
Malice Lady, this way.

[*Exeunt* VITA *and* MALICE.]

Faith [*going*] Alas! Hope's very name
Hath flung its spell around her! I must follow. [*Exit*]

[*Scene II. A heart-shaped cave.* HOPE *bending over a chaldron.*]

Hope [*sings*] Stir! Stir! The fire hisses!
Pour in laughter, throw in kisses,
Breathe in comfort, drop in blisses.
Stir! Stir! It boils! It sisses!
Hope mixes well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! Skim off a tear!
Pluck away a scorching fear!
Strain a memory out here!
Lay a spicy May-be near!
It seasons well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! The fire screams!
Fling in visions! Fling in dreams!
Fling in ecstasies, and gleams
Of a joy that madness seems!
It worketh well—well—well!

Stir! Stir! There's time to spare!
Here a wish and there a prayer
Make a charm that well shall wear!
Though long weeping wash it bare,
It holdeth well—well—well!

[*Enter* VITA *and* MALICE.]

Malice Yonder is Hope, the Sorceress.

Vita That, Hope?
So old is she?

Malice Ay, older than man's knowledge.

Vita She hath strange eyes.

Malice They look out into darkness.

Vita She hath a marvellous expression. Look.
Is't Joy, or Dread, or Pain, or Wonderment,
Or uttermost Desire?

Malice All. It is Hope.

Vita Will she be wroth if I bespeak her?

Malice Nay,
None hears more willingly. Call thou on her,
And I will wait without. [*Exit*]

Vita Hope! Hope!

Hope I hear.
Hope never sleeps.

Vita I need thee, Hope.

Hope Ay. Ay.
All need me.

Vita But my need of all is greatest.
My life is blank, and flavorless, and dead,
And all my heart is black with emptiness!

Hope I will breathe life into thy life.

Vita O Hope,
What more?

Hope I will fill up thy heart with fire
That Death alone shall quench.

Vita What more, O Hope?
Would'st thou consume me with an inward flame,
Nor give it aught to feed on?

Hope It shall feed
Upon itself, yet grow with its consuming.

Vita What dost thou grant me but a vast soul-hunger
That shall know no appeasing! Give me more,
Else shall I die with ecstasy of longing
And slow despair of gain.

Hope What is despair?
Longing I know, but know not of despair.

Vita Teach me, too, to unlearn it!

Hope Where Hope is,
Is room for no despair. Dost thou want more?

Vita This—this—but this! Oh give me Happiness!

Hope The sum of all wants—Happiness. Ay. Ay.
Earth's best. Earth's farthest. Earth's impossible.
The finite's infinite! Poor fool. Poor fool.

Vita Canst help me not?

Hope Yea. I can blind thine eyes
So thou shalt think thou graspest all of Heaven
With but the upward stretching of a hand.
Yea. I can bind such sandals to thy feet
Thou shalt walk over sword-blades league on league
To pluck a nettle, and not know they bleed.
Yea. I can teach such bluntness to thine ears
That thou shalt hear no sound neath God's great sun,
Save the mad beatings of thy maddest heart!

Vita Kind Heaven protect me from such gifts, O
Hast thou but these? [Hope!

Hope Nay, others. I have balm
Whereby heart-stabs are healed. And drugs I have
Whereby grief sleeps, and weakness is made strength,
And fear is turned to courage. I have charms
To lure the dying back to life,—to keep
Hearts young for ever, glorify the dark,
And wreathe dead lips with smiles.

Vita Canst do so much,
Thou surely hast some magic yet unspent
Whereby I may find Happiness again.

Hope What is thy Happiness? Old Age asks Youth.

And Youth asks Wisdom, Wisdom Ignorance,
And Ignorance asks Happiness. Poor child!
But peace! Thou shalt find Happiness again.

Vita Dost promise it? O Hope, I live anew!
And then?

Hope Peace, peace! What is thy Happiness?

Vita A winged immortal.

Hope Take with thee this weed [*giving it*]
Wherewith if thou anoint his eyes but once,
He sees no more to fly. [*sings*]

Stir! Stir! Skim off a tear!
Pluck away a scorching fear!
Strain a memory out here!
Lay a spicy May-be near!
It seasons well—well—well.

Vita He loves me not.
What gain I though he fold his wings? For, blind,
How may he see to love me?

Hope Love is madness.
Shed then these petals o'er him. [*giving blossom*] They
[shall clear
His sight to lay his blindness on his brain. [*sings*]

Stir! Stir! The fire screams!
Fling in visions, fling in dreams,
Fling in ecstasies and gleams

Of a joy that madness seems !
It worketh well—well—well.

Vita But if he see again, having yet wings
And no more reason, how keep him mine own ?

Hope O senseless soul ! Then lay thou hold on him.
With the first touch of thine attaining hand
Shall Happiness become Reality.
Canst thou ask more ?

Vita Then let me die for bliss !

Hope Then, rather, curse not Hope for her beguilement·

Stir ! Stir ! The fire hisses ! [*sings*]
Pour in laughter ! Throw in kisses !
Breathe in comfort ! Drop in blisses !
Stir ! Stir ! It boils ! It sisses !
Hope mixes well—well—well.

Vita Lo, how thou changest as I look on thee,
O Hope ! Thou growest young and fair—most fair,—
Most sweet and pleasant to the eye and soul.

Hope [*sings*] Stir ! Stir ! There's time to spare!
Here a wish and there a prayer
Make a charm that well shall wear !
Though long weeping wash it bare,
It holdeth well—well—well !

[Hope *disappears in the smoke of the chaldron. The flame flashes up, dies suddenly out, and all is dark and still.*]

Vita [*in terror*] Faith! Faith! Where art thou?

[*Enter* FAITH, *running*.]

Faith Here, sweet Mistress, here!

Vita [*clinging to her*] Leave thou me not! Hope
[was here, and is gone,
And all the night breathes blackness and despair!

ACT III

[*Scene I. The forest. After midnight.* VITA *and the Court.*]

Vita [*to* HISTORY.] Hast seen him?

History Ay, we have seen trace of him.

Vita Is that all one with seeing Happiness?

Faith I have caught glimpses of his wings afar.

1st Courtier Methought I saw him once, but was not [sure.

Vita How seemed he?

1st Courtier Hung all round with golden ducats;
Heavy with gold,—a moving, yellow sheen,—
A dazzling pyramid of wealth.

2d Courtier Why nay,
Not so he looked when once in some swift dream
I saw him passing. He was fair and fine,
But pale and wan, and had a famished look.
Men called him Fame, methought.

3d Courtier And when I dreamed,
He wore a crown,—bespattered, yet a crown,—
And held a sceptre bare of gold or jewels,
But studded close with drops of ruby blood,
And had a grand strong look, and was called Power.
Oh he did draw me with that magnet look!
I would have given wealth and love and honor—
All—to possess him! But he vanished swift,
And I came never nigh enough again
To know if that were he.

History He hath a shape
Baffles description,—now comes masked as War,
And now as Tyranny.

Care I know him not;
But to my weary longing he should look
A dreamless, ageless Sleep, with slumbrous eyes,
And lips soft-closed on speech.

Malice Delusions all!
Delusions!

Faith I, too, dreamed of him, and dear
The dream, e'en if he not resemble it.
But I shall know him when God gives the sight,
And be content, whate'er the vision be.

Vita But I have seen him. And he is the one
Desirable of life,—life's one perfection.
And I have lost him! Oh the way is long

To follow, and the road is hard to travel !—
The harder and the longer, that he once
Hath passed this way.

3d Courtier [*to 1st Courtier.*] Look friend, if thou first
To Happiness, give thou me of thy gold, [come
And I, when I reach fame, will render thee
The grace of having thus befriended me
In mine obscurity.

3d Courtier [*to 1st and 2d Courtier.*] And friends, if
Be yours, spare thou me of thy gold, and thou [luck
Speak well of me, and I, when I do come
Unto mine own, will hold ye unforgotten.

Malice He will remember to cut off your heads
Belike !

Care [*anxiously*] It groweth late. How longer search ?

History If I do find him, I will close my book
And write no more.

3d Courtier [*to History*] First, prithee, note my name.
Petty the rule ignored of History !

2d Courtier And mine, too, write, lest on my brows
Wither at death. [Fame's bay

1st Courtier And my poor name inscribe.
The richest is not rich, if all not know it.

Malice Nor is he rich, than whom there lives one
[richer.

Care And I, should chance wing Happiness my way,

Will fold my hands and sleep forevermore.
But not for me is rest,—ah, not for me!
They who but once, with tired feet and slow,
Have climbed up out of the sweet vale of Rest
Into the chill airs of Anxiety,
May nevermore descend to that green plain;
But like the bare tree on the mountain top,
Stood as a sign for clouds and storms to steer for
And tossed by tireless winds while all else sleeps,
They, too, must wake and watch and dread for ever.

[*Enter* TIME]

Time Who says for ever? Mine alone the word.

Malice What is not thine, save Happiness!

Time On. On.

Care Oh Heavens, where to look for Happiness!
Where, where is Happiness!

Malice Beyond the grave.

[*Exeunt* CARE *and* MALICE.]

Time Who loiters in my presence? Forward. Forward.

3d Courtier I will get gold yet! [*Exit*]

2d Courtier And I will win fame! [*Exit*]

1st Courtier And I will yet have power, or die for it!
[*Exit*]

Faith Did men seek Goodness with a tithe that zeal
Wherewith they labor after Happiness,

Who is there but should save his soul alive! [*Exit*]

Time The hour passes. The night wanes. On. On. For ever on.

History Oh tide with no reflux! [*Exit*]

Time [*to Vita*] Thou movest not?

Vita [*suddenly turning to Time*] Father, guide me to [Truth!

Time To Truth? Pray what would'st thou of Truth
Who thy life long hast held apart from her, [at last,
Abhorred her, shunned her as an evil thing?

Vita I have not loved her since I first knew choice.
Nor do I now desire her. Nay, oh nay.
Save that by her I may win Happiness,
I ne'er should seek her—ne'er should ask to know
In what dark spot and far thou hast concealed her
So she disturb me not with her white aspect
And solemn star-lit eyes! But what last test
Could fright me from the search for Happiness?
I would walk barefoot over blazing coals,
Prick myself full of poisoned disappointments,
Starve--thirst--freeze--burn, be slaughtered piecemeal,--
Make life an hourly hell,—all, all, and more, [ay,
For the poor chance of winning Happiness
In some far day I may not live to see!
Wherefore, if Truth bring me to Happiness,
Dare I face even Truth. I pray thee, Father,

Give up thy long held secret! Where is Truth?

Time How may Truth help thee?

Vita Happiness seeks Truth.
He loves her. Who beloved of Happiness
Will turn him a deaf ear? Hid ne'er so long,
Hid ne'er so deep, so far, he yet must find her,—
Truth yet reveal herself to him who loves her.

Time And what would'st thou against it?

Vita Alas, what!
Thy words outstrip my thought. I do but mean,
Knowing so surely Happiness must come
Where Truth may be, there to conceal myself
And wait his coming. So shall I once more
Behold him, once more have him near to me,
And for the rest,—Hope help me!

Time Hast thou Hope?
Then to gainsay were idle. Do thy will.
Who lists to Hope, hears never voice beside.

Vita Bring me to Truth then. Oh, how thou art slow
When wishes fly before thee,—how art swift
When wishes follow! Tell me—where is Truth?

Time [*indicating a cave in front of which Vita is standing.*] Beside thee.

Vita [*starting back.*] Nay, not here! So close at hand!
So swiftly reached!

Time They need not to seek far

Who seek Truth truly. Yonder darksome way
Leadeth to Truth and Light. Heaven be with thee.
[*Exit*]

[VITA *draws back from the cave, and watching, presently sees* HAPPINESS *approaching.*]

Vita Ha, none too soon! Lo, hither through the [gloom,
Led by the lantern of his love and trust,
Comes Happiness. Now Hope, O Hope, befriend [me!

[*She conceals herself among the trees.* HAPPINESS *draws near.*]

Happiness Truth! Truth! No answer still? Thou [art not far.
I feel thy holy heartbeats through the silence,
And know thou must be near. How come to thee?
The night is very dark: the forest dense:
The way uncertain: and I wander long.
Where art thou? I have asked the stars for thee,—
They whose pure eyes Earth's darkest secrets pierce.
I asked thee of the winds, whose odorous wings,
Soft with the scents of wafted flower-breaths,
Or strong with resinous savors of the North
And salt with foam-flecks torn from scattering seas,
Incessant sweep the Earth from pole to pole.
I asked thee of the streams, whose silver feet,
Leaping with passioned joy from rock to chasm,

Search Earth's remotest depths. I asked all things;
And all things answered: Truth is everywhere.
And so I come no nearer thee. O Truth,
I weary for thee! I have called so long
My voice grows faint. Weak Nature hath no strength
To mate her strongest wills with. For awhile
Let me lay by my will, until I rest
That which is least of me, yet rules the greater.

[*He sinks upon the ground.*]

Night lies upon mine eyelids like a flower,
Humid and sweet, endrowsing all my senses;
And sleep hath flung her lasso round my limbs.
They move no more, though shadowy shapes bend
Wave languorous arms, and beckon me to follow. [close,

[*He falls asleep.* VITA *appears.*]

Vita Yea, Sleep hath come to him. And with Sleep I,
Albeit he called me not. Ah, generous Sleep,
Who gives him me by wresting all else from him!
But that I lose him not at his awaking,
I thus obey thee, Hope!

[*She passes the weed across his eyes.*]

Now Love, dear Love,—
Thou only Love of all mine uncrowned life,—
Awake! Awake!

[*She draws back as he starts to his feet.*]

Happiness [*groping as if blind*] I hear. [*listens*] Me-
[thought one called.

How blindly dark the night! I cannot see.
Who was it called? [*listens*] Where is the voice that
[called?
O Truth, how can I reach thee through such night?
I am grown blind with darkness. Speak, oh speak,
Thou who didst speak before! I listen. Speak!

Vita I called thee, Happiness.

Happiness Who art thou? Who?
I cannot see thee if I know thy face.
How know'st thou me? Who art thou? Speak again.
O God, can it be Truth? Speak! Art thou Truth?

Vita Prove me, and see.

Happiness How may I hope to find
Pathway through this impenetrable Black?
Art thou or art thou not? O God, give light,
That I may know if this be she!

Vita Hush! Hush!
I am she. I am Truth.

Happiness Thou? Thou? Art Truth?
O Heaven, open! Let one single ray
Fall on me from above to clear mine eyes,
That I may see if this be very Truth
Or basest Falsehood. How may I distinguish?
How know the right from wrong in so great black-
[ness?
Oh, this is worse than weakness—worse than death—

This is despair!

Vita Fear not.

Happiness Nay, wert thou Truth,
How should I fear? It is my fear I fear.
Doubt proves thee false. Wert thou indeed that Truth
I thought thee, should my heart not know thee now,
And thou stand plainly forth to my soul's sight
Through all the dimness of my sense's vision?
Is Truth not brighter than the moon and stars
And all Day's light? How should it then be dark
Where Truth is? Nay. Thou art not Truth.

Vita I am.

Happiness Nay. For my soul disclaims thee. Thou
[art not.
I feel Truth near, yet know thou art not she. [*turns*
[*away*]

Vita O Hope, Hope, help me! See! He goes!
[*She tears the flower from her breast.*] [He goes!
But still I have a charm. Now, thou blind Groper,
Hater of all fair Falsehoods for the sake
Of one lost Truth, behold me with thine eyes.
Look on me, see me, love me for my fairness,
If not for Truth's sake!

[*She flings the flower at him, and it breaks over him in a shower of petals.*]

Happiness Ha! Once more I see!

Oh Heavens, I see! And lo, there is no Truth!
Great God, have mercy on my maddened soul!
I stand alone in a blank universe,
Groping for Truth, and catching hold of Lies!
Oh, give me back my blindness, Heaven! Better
The doubt than the despair! Who then art thou
That callest thyself Truth? Oh, how I hate thee
For taking on thyself so sweet a name
To cover so foul wrong! There is no Truth,
No Truth in all the world! It was a dream,—
A heavenly dream,—and thou hast marred it! Fool—
Fool that I am! I have gone mad for Truth,
And Truth is not, and there is naught but madness!
O God, what frenzy hath me? All my being
Doth uncreate itself and turn to nothing
If Truth be not! Truth! Truth! Oh save me, Truth!

[*He rushes madly toward the mouth of the cave.*]

Vita [*springing to him*] Hope, thou deceiver, help, or
[*She catches the fringe of his mantle.*] [he is lost!
Not so shalt thou escape me, Happiness!
With these my hands I grasp thee, hold thee, keep
Making thee mine by very force of will! [thee,
Thou shalt not leave me! Never! Nevermore!

Happiness Lo, reason with thy touch returns. Thank
And thank thee, Vita. Truth shall yet be mine! [God,

Vita [*looking at him in fear*] Who art thou whom I
[hold? Art Happiness,—

That Happiness, whom only thus to touch
Once was my dream of Heaven? Art thou he?
[*She relinquishes her hold.*]
Thou hast betrayed me, Hope,—undone me, Hope!
Dearer the longing for than the possession!
Sweeter the dream than the reality!

[*She covers her face with her hands. Enter* TIME *and* COURT.]

Time Yonder is Happiness.

3 Courtiers That, Happiness?
Not so I dreamed him!

Malice Is it naught but this
We made such moan for and such toilsome search?

Care Alas, he rests me not!

Faith [*joyfully*] O Happiness,
Is 't given me to see thee, and so nigh!
I am too blest. My heart is all too full.

History Can it be yon is Happiness? He seems
Unlike all things e'er known, or named, or dreamed of!

Faith Therein his blessedness. What mind could image
Aught so divine?

All [*discontentedly*] And is this what we sought?—
This what we labored for? Not this! Not this!

[*They draw back, murmuring.* TRUTH *appears veiled at the entrance of the cave.* HAPPINESS *flings himself at her feet.*]

Happiness Truth! Truth! 'Tis thou! Thank God,
['tis Truth at last!

Truth [*to* HAPPINESS] Dost know me?

Happiness Verily! My whole heart knows thee,
And is confounded at thy loveliness!

Truth [*to* VITA] Knowest thou me?

Vita [*sullenly*] Yea. Yea. I know thee well.
I love thee not, yet must, shame-faced, confess thee.
Veiled though thou art, thy features hid from me,
I know thee, Truth, and dare not cry: Begone!

Truth [*to the others*] And know ye me?

[*She turns toward them slowly, lifting her veil, and a light streams suddenly out from where she stands, illumining the entire stage.*]

History By all most sacred, no!
If yon be Truth, then hath my pen thus long
Been dipped in falsehoods, and indited lies!

Malice It hath grown strangely light! We do look
Transformed and ugly, seen in such white glare. [grey,

Care And thou the greyest, ugliest of all!
Myself shows noble by the side of thee.

1st Courtier [*to 3d Courtier*] I never saw thee rightly
Out on thee for a miser! Avarice [till this hour.
Leaves no room in thy soul for Happiness.

3d Courtier [*to 1st and 2d*] What has come over ye?
[In Truth's strong light,

Thou art a Schemer! Thou a sickly Rhymster!

[TRUTH *still looks at them with lifted veil, and confused, all the court withdraws.*]

Time O miserable world! O frightened fools,
Stripped a brief space of your lifelong disguises!
Draw back! Draw back! Not yet may ye confront
Ay, Truth, I know thee! Thou wast given me [her!
In trust, and I have hid thee from the world,
Though some bold souls have dared a glimpse at thee,
And died or maddened for thy sake; and some
Have hated thee for thy surpassing grace,
While some have prayed for thee on bended knees,
But with shut eyes, lest sight of thee should blast them!
Not yet thine hour, O Truth! But soon shall dawn
A day when I may bring thee forth unveiled,
God's best, and last, and highest revelation.
Till then,—pass, pass, ye anxious ages, pass!

[*Exit* TIME *slowly.*]

Faith [*falling on her knees*] Till then thank Heaven,
[who hath accorded us
The knowledge that thou livest, and the will
To love thee, long for thee, aspire to thee,
If need be die for thee, O rare sweet Truth!

Truth [*to* HAPPINESS] Thou hast long sought me.
[Come. I am thine own.

Happiness [*clasping her in his arms*] Oh holy moment!
[joy vouchsafed of Heaven!

Lo, Truth and Happiness are one for ever!

[TRUTH *drops her veil. The light gradually fades away and twilight succeeds, as* HAPPINESS *and* TRUTH *disappear together in the cave.* VITA *and* FAITH *are left alone upon the scene.* VITA *throws herself upon her face on the ground.*]

Vita Farewell! Farewell! Farewell! Now break, my heart.
I would have done with life, who thus have done
With Happiness. O cruel Hope and false!
Oh bitterest end! supremest wretchedness!
Oh masterwork of woe!

Faith Hush, Vita, hush!
What life is there but hides the memory
Of some dead day that once held Happiness?
What hath our Earth for any more than this,—
The passing glimpse of a fleet Happiness,
And tardy knowledge of a living Truth
Somewhere beyond our reach? Enough, enough
Only to follow after;—oh enough,
Seeking for Truth, to know that some far day
We shall find Truth, and with Truth, Happiness!

[VITA *ceases weeping, and lifting her head to* FAITH'S *shoulder, clings to her, comforted. The day broadens.*]

Chorus [*behind the scenes.*]
O Life! O Life! O Life!

What art thou, pray?
A loss; a search; a strife
For a brief day.
A waking and a sleeping;
A losing and a keeping;
A laughing and a weeping
Along the way.

O Life! O Life! O Life!
What art thou, pray?
A little hour, rife
With deeds that weigh.
A breaking, or a binding;
A forgetting, or a minding;
A scattering, or finding
Now for alway!

[*The stage is illumined with a bright light coming from* TRUTH'S *cave, and the curtain falls with the last line of the song, leaving* VITA *and* FAITH *with their arms entwined.*]

THE END

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